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S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE

O P E N I N G

OF THE

N E W C H A P E L

AT

ESSEX-STREET, STRAND,

On SUNDAY, MARCH 29, 1778.

BY

THEOPHILUS LINDSEY, M.A.

L O N D O N :

Printed for J. JOHNSON, No. 72, St. Paul's Church-yard.

MEMORIAL

PREACHED AT THE

OF THE

NEW HAVEN

AT

BRICK-STREET, STRAND,

ON SUNDAY, MARCH 22, 1778.



BY

THEOPHILUS LINDSEY, M.A.

LONDON:

Printed for J. Galt, in St. Paul's Church-yard.

T H E

PRAYER before the SERMON.

HOLY, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,
*who art, and who wast, and who art
 to come !*

*Thou art God alone, and beside thee there
 is no other.*

*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory,
 honour, and power : for thou hast created all
 things, and for thy pleasure, which is no-
 thing but the most perfect happiness of thy
 creatures, they are and were created !*

We desire to express before thee, O thou
 sovereign disposer of all things, our joy and
 gratitude, that we and all our concerns are
 in thy hands.

And as thine infinite wisdom ordereth
 and appointeth every thing belonging to us,
 the time, situation, and circumstances of
 our life, and our dependencies and connec-
 tions with each other ; We beseech thee,
 O Lord, to sanctify and bless us in the par-
 ticular relation in which we that are now
 before thee, are united together, that we
 may answer thy gracious designs therein,
 and that it may be for our mutual improve-
 ment in virtue and holiness.

B

For

For this end, send down, we pray thee, thine especial blessing on thine unworthy servant, whom thou continuest to uphold in ministering to thy truth; thy power and goodness being made more apparent by the weakness of the instrument thou employest.

Let this be a lesson to him, more and more to cleave unto thee, and to declare thy name and thy goodness to others.

What he shall learn out of thy holy word, and by diligent humble search after thy truth, enable him to communicate faithfully to others; and to *deliver his own soul, in warning the wicked to turn from his evil way, lest he die in his iniquity.*

And do thou also open the hearts of thy people to receive the truth with readiness, and carefully and impartially to examine what they hear, and embrace what is agreeable to thy will, that they may be perfect and prepared unto every good work, and may act the part thou hast assigned them with inviolable integrity, unmoved by the enticements of a vain world.

Increase among us, O Lord, and in the world at large, a spirit of serious inquiry into thy revealed word, that may alarm and awaken those unhappy men who are asleep in unbelief, or immersed in sensuality and vice, lest they be given up to a hardened unsearching mind, the most fatal state of thy

thy reasonable creatures, made for thyself
and for endless improvements in virtue.

And grant, that this house, in which we
are now first assembled, may be a place in
which we may meet thee our God, and have
satisfaction in drawing near unto thee; in
which also thy pure word may be effectually
preached, and many edified thereby; and,
O merciful and righteous Father, let the
prayers and supplications which shall be at
any time offered up therein, *be heard in
heaven, thy dwelling place; and when thou
hearest, forgive!*

These our requests we offer up unto thee,
O Father, as the disciples of thy son Jesus
Christ, through whom be ascribed unto
thee praise, thanksgiving, and adoration,
now and for ever. Amen.

JOHN iv. 23, 24.

The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

IN this chapter, we have a dialogue between our Lord and a woman of Samaria, whom he accidentally met with; although indeed, strictly speaking, nothing can be said to happen but by the ordering of divine providence, and his meeting with her was of great importance to her and to many others;: o us also, if we profit as we ought by what is recorded of him there.

The history which has been rehearsed to you to day, shews how intent he always was on the great end of his mission, to bring sinners to repentance, and to enlighten and benefit whomsoever he found well-disposed; and also affords an instance of his wonderful skill as a divine teacher and reformer, by suitable questions to lead persons to the point he aimed at, to draw out their inward dispositions, and shew them to themselves.

Having discovered to this woman, by the knowlege given to him from God, some secret enormities of her life, which she was persuaded he could not have come at
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the knowlege of by any human * means, she was much awed, and disturbed at it; for his manner and appearance, and the conversation that he had already held with her, would bespeak him a holy man; but now she would begin to look upon him as somewhat extraordinary, like one of their ancient prophets.

She had the presence of mind therefore to put to him what she deemed a most important question; she requested him to resolve her about the religious dispute betwixt the Jews and Samaritans, concerning the right place of worship. For she had been used to look upon religion as a thing without her, a matter of form and ceremony, and to consist in a mighty zeal for their Samaritan mode of worship, in preference to that of the Jews.

Our Saviour was desirous to lead her to juster sentiments and a more virtuous practice; to the true worship of God, that inward application of thought to the most holy and perfect Being, which brings him immediately to the heart as a constant inspector to pass sentence there, which cannot but create a fear of offending him, and become a most powerful motive to virtue and holiness. He therefore tells her, that although the Samaritans were in error, the

* Joh. i. 49. We have the case of a person's being convinced of Jesus's divine authority and of his being the Messiah, from a similar instance of his power in discerning the secret actions of men.

matter was of little importance now ; that there was something of greater moment to be attended to by her and by all ;

v. 21, &c. "*Jesus saith unto her ; Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship what ye do not know : * We worship what we do know ; for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth ; for the Father seeketh such to worship him.*"

When he here saith ; "*The hour cometh, and now is ;*" he refers to that predetermined period of time in the divine mind now arrived, of which their sacred writings had spoken, when "*the Lord their God would raise up unto them a prophet, from the midst of them, of their brethren, like unto Moses,*" (Deut. xviii. 15.) who was to declare to them, (John i. 18.) the whole will of God ; "*the time of reformation,*" (Heb. ix. 10.) when all mankind would be taught the worship and obedience of the *Father, the only true God,* (John xvii. 3.) by the last great prophet and messenger of his will.

And in the words I have read to you, the benevolent Saviour exults in the thought, that the time was coming, was already

* So the late Bp. Pearce very rightly amends our present english version. See his "*Commentary,*" p. 484. come,

come, (what equal source of joy could there be to a good mind?) when the true God would be known and worshiped by his creatures of mankind, and he himself be the chosen instrument of so great a blessing to them.

The subject is important. Who is the Being we are alone to worship? What he is? and which the most acceptable way of worshipping him? To these points I propose to lead your thoughts at present.

I.

The apostle Paul, preaching to his learned audience at Athens, with masterly address, and a becoming dignity and boldness, begins directly and at once with inculcating the knowledge of God, the Maker and Governor of all things, previous to such mention of Jesus Christ as he judged proper to lay before them at that time, viz. (Acts xvii. 23, 24, 31.) that "*God hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that * MAN whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance to*

* St. Paul tells the assembly, that our Saviour *was a man, alive, ordained to an important office, by God that made the world and all things that are therein.* Can it be supposed that the apostle deceived his hearers, and told them only half the truth concerning Christ's person? Must we not rather conclude, that he himself held Christ only to be a man indued with extraordinary powers from God, the creator of all things, and so taught all others to believe concerning him; and never taught that Christ was God and the maker of all things.

all men in that he hath raised him from the dead." For with all their boast of science and improvement in arts, the Athenians were buried in gross idolatry *. And it was necessary to impress their minds with a feeling conviction of the power, wisdom, goodness, and righteous government of the Creator and universal Father, and the reality of a future state of account, that they might be disposed to receive the gracious offers of eternal life (Acts xi. 18.) to a repenting world, which Jesus brought from God to all men, and to attend to the awful proof of his divine mission and authority, which Paul laid before them.

But our Lord never set himself designedly to instruct his countrymen in the doctrine of the divine unity; to tell them that Jehovah was God, and no other besides him, and that to him alone they were to look

* The Gods publicly worshipped were deified men, who had some of them been bad, vicious characters. The philosophers laughed at them in their private meetings, and yet gravely joined the multitude in worshipping them. Of even Socrates himself, an eminent author remarks, that "he appears publicly to plead his own acknowledgement of their divinities, and approbation of their established worship; both which were abominable, and often treated accordingly upon the stage; and which therefore no such excuse as that of avoiding to disturb the public peace, or not offending the weak minds of the people, or obviating persecution, can ever justify."

Bp. Law's Considerations &c. p. 329, 330.

up
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up in prayer; although, in his public instructions, he unavoidably and continually held forth these great truths in an indirect manner.

It would have exposed him to their contempt and mockery, who were many of them so eager to cavil against him, if he had attempted to inform them of what they already knew and practised, from which they had never swerved, by falling into idolatry, since their long captivity in Babylon; and, to do them justice, have never swerved to this hour.

They were firmly grounded in this first and great article of religion, by the aid of that revelation which God had given of himself and his will by Moses; from which Jesus drew his first knowledge, and to which he constantly appealed.

For he himself was one of the hebrew people, and a worshiper of the same God with them; as he here tells this person, v. 22. *WE worship what WE do know.*

Christians are yet divided with respect to the object of their worship, whether one, two, or three persons. This * woman was clear

* Some illustration of our Lord's words, ver. 22. may be proper, lest any should think that they contradict what is here asserted, that this Samaritan woman wanted no light with respect to the object of worship.

It had pleased God to prescribe to the Jews a form of worship with circumstances of great exactness, and
to

as to this point, and needed no instruction, as were also the Samaritans and Jews universally, agreeing most intirely with Christ and his apostles, that the Father only was God, and to be worshiped. So that many had need to have recourse to the Jews*, and their writings, to be settled in this great point.

There

to fix Jerusalem for the place of his public worship; although this partial, local worship was always designed to give way to that which was universal, confined to no place. In the mean while, although the Samaritan worship was addressed to the true God, the Father, our Saviour tells the woman, *Ye worship what ye do not know*, one whom ye do not know, i. e. (See John xiv. 17. xvii. 25.) one who has not distinguished you with any marks of singular favour; to whom ye do not stand in any particular relation. (See the account of the origin of the people of Samaria, 2. Kings xvii. 24, &c.) and therefore ye have no reason to assert, that your worship of God in a particular place stands on the least foundation. But *we* (Jews) worship what we do know. God has chosen us to be his people, and shewed us extraordinary favours, and therefore we may justly conclude that his true way of worship is with us. The Jews and Samaritans then were both agreed, and were right, with respect to the object of worship: but the difference was, that the Samaritan worship was a will-worship, a ritual of human authority; but that of the Jews constituted by God, and therefore to be depended upon: and it was a strong evidence of this, that *salvation*, i. e. the Messiah was to spring, not from the Samaritan country, but from the Jews, i. e. the tribe of Judah.

* It is not a little to the honour of the Jews, that those christians who adhered strictly to the unity of God, were accused of *judaizing*, of bringing judaism into christianity. Paul, Bp. of Antioch, in the third century taught, what others had taught before him, that Christ then began to be, when he was born of Mary.

There was, however, an occasion where we find our Lord drawn incidentally to speak his sentiments of the divine Unity in a manner worthy our attention. It was, upon being asked by one of the learned of his nation; (Mark xii. 28, 29, 30.) *which is the first commandment of all.* And Jesus answered him; *the first of all the commandments is, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart and with all thy soul, with all thy mind, with all thy strength.*

Observe that he adopts the very words of Moses. And this may be called *our Saviour's public confession, or declaration of his faith in God.*

Mary. Epiphanius, a Bishop in the fourth century, says, that "upon the doctrine of the deity, the followers of Paul said no more than the Jews;" and again, "that introducing judaism, and teaching nothing more than them, they are Jews, and ought to be so called; though to speak the truth, they do not practise circumcision, nor keep the sabbath, nor follow any other jewish customs." See more instances in Lardner, vol. iv. part 2. p. 635, 636.

These persons did not consider, that Christ and his apostles were of the nation of the Jews, and held their doctrine concerning the unity of God: for throughout the whole N. T. you never find the Jews blamed by them in this respect. And St. Paul, in his defence before Felix the Roman governor, declared that he "worshipped, (Acts xxiv. 14.) *the God of his Father.*" Paul's God, then, after his conversion to christianity, was the same as before he knew Christ.

After

After which follows the Jewish Doctor's approbation of it, in these remarkable words, v. 32. *And the scribe said unto him, well, Master ! thou hast said the truth : for there is one God, and there is none other but * he.* Had the man misunderstood him, our Lord would surely have set him right.

Jesus therefore knew of no other God but One : Whom he here calls *the Father*, and constantly makes use of that tender and endearing appellation in speaking of him by whom he was highly distinguished and beloved ; in which language he has also authorized us to address the infinite creator, and thus as it were to bring him near to us, the creatures also of his goodness, and highly favoured by him.

And it deserves our especial attention, that our Saviour, by constantly calling the great God his Father, did thereby acknowledge that he received his being and all he enjoyed from him ; in like manner as we acknowledge the same, when we call God, our Father.

* Exodus xx. 1, 2, 3. “ *God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God : thou shalt have no other Gods before ME.* According to this first commandment, God is one single person For the term *me* can in no way signify more persons than one. The same may be, and often has been observed concerning the words *I, he, him, thou, thee*, continually applied to God by himself, and his prophets, which language totally excludes any other person from being God but one person, him whom our Saviour calls *the Father*.

It

It may fill us with wonder and concern, that there should have been so early a defection among Christians, and of such long continuance, from this great article which Jesus taught, that the Father alone is the God whom all are to worship.

But they were a few leading names at first, that brought in this long chain of error. So that here, as in many other respects, the sense of antiquity, with which we are wont to be too much dazzled, is nothing but the opinion of one man, or a few, whose fancies pleased at the time, and whom others follow, one generation after another, like sheep in the track. they are led, without thinking or considering what leads them.

The Jews indeed, who embraced the gospel in great numbers after Christ's resurrection, never departed from this doctrine of the divine unity, of worshipping the Father alone; and they subsisted together in separate churches, or worshipping societies to the end of the 4th century.

But the heathen converts, especially the learned amongst them, transplanting their pagan ideas * into christianity, corrupted the simplicity of its doctrine and worship from the very first, and opened a door to

* See "Disquisitions on Matter and Spirit, part 2d, concerning the influence of Philosophy on Christianity." Sections iv. v. vi. by Dr. Priestley.

still

still wider deviations from it afterwards. Misled by a false philosophy, and ashamed to own a crucified man, however excellent and perfect, to be their Saviour and the founder of their religion, they maintained even in the time of some of the Apostles, that Christ was a superior, pre-existent spirit, a pure emanation of the deity, incapable of suffering, and who only put on the appearance of a man. Their followers, by degrees, improved on their fanciful inventions, till at length they came to call him the SUPREME GOD, and to worship him as such.

But may we not, with our Lord's own words before us, justly suppose him thus to speak to those who worship him, and not the Father alone?

“Why do ye address your devotions to me? Did I ever direct you to do it, or propose myself as an object of religious worship?”

“Did I not uniformly, and to the last, set you an example myself of praying to the Father; *to my Father* (John xx. 17.) *and your Father, to my God and your God?*”

“When my disciples requested me to teach them to pray; (Luke xi. 1, 2.) did I teach them to pray to myself, or to any other person, but the Father? Did I not enjoin them to pray to the Father?”

“Did

“ Did I ever call myself God, or tell you that I was the * maker of the world, and to be worshipped !

Such

* As this however is commonly, but erroneously, supposed to be asserted by our Saviour's favourite apostle, John, in the preface to his gospel, namely, *that Christ is God, and the maker of all things* ; I take this opportunity of proposing the following argument in confutation of that opinion, by way of addition to what has been alleged more at large in another place. *Sequel to the Apology, &c. ch. iii.*

The most judicious critics of the N. T. have been of opinion, that the three evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, composed and published their histories of Christ without each others privacy. And their apparent and undoubted design in writing, was to give such an account of their divine Master, as might be sufficient to engage men to become his disciples, and entitle them to the favour of God for ever. But in perusing their writings, as also the *Acts of the Apostles* written by Luke, no one could conclude, that they looked upon Christ to be any other than a *Man*, their great expected prophet, gifted with extraordinary wisdom and powers for the office he was to sustain : for they describe only his parentage, birth, infancy, gradual improvements in wisdom, life, sufferings and death. Now if these men, had known and believed that their master Jesus was God and creator of the world, it is utterly incredible that they should never have dropt the least hint of it, especially when its infinite importance is considered, as so necessary to give a just idea of Christ, and as a motive to prevail with men to attend to him.

This therefore may lead us to embrace those explanations of the introduction to John's gospel, which shew, that by the *Logos*, the word, wisdom, reason, (which the term *Logos* signifies,) we are not to understand Christ, but an attribute of God, his powerful word or wisdom, which is the same as God himself,

by

Such important points as these, he should not have left to be gathered from doubtful * passages, or ambiguous † expressions; from equivocal ‡ actions, or incidental § words

by which all things were made, all light and knowledge communicated to the world, and Jesus himself enlightened; especially when it is considered, that St. John never afterwards once gives this name Logos, to Christ, throughout his gospel-history, which is most extraordinary; after such a pompous setting out with it, if it really did belong to him, and he intended it for him; and when also it is observable, that our evangelist has recorded many more of our Saviour's sayings than the other evangelists, in which he acknowledges himself to owe every thing to God, v. 19. 31. vii. 16. viii. 28, and calls himself not only the *Son of Man*, but a *Man*, viii. 40, and his apostles *his brethren*, fellow-creatures, xx. 17.

* *doubtful passages*) Such, for example, as Stephen's invocation of Jesus (Acts vii. 59.) soon after beholding him in a vision; and which, however it be interpreted, would scarce lead any one to conclude but that the holy man, at all other times, made it his practice to pray to the Father alone, to whom Christ always prayed himself, and commanded others to pray. *Sequel*, p. 60. 69.

† *ambiguous expressions*) as that of St. Paul, 2 Cor. xii. 8, which some understand to be spoken of Christ: others, more probably, that God himself is the *Lord* there mentioned.

‡ *equivocal actions*) Christ was frequently *worshiped* by those that knew his great character as a prophet of God, and saw his miracles. But it cannot thence be inferred that he was God, as the term *worship*, though commonly appropriated to God, signifies in general the respect paid to a superior: Daniel ii. 48. Matth. xviii. 26. Acts x. 25.

§ *incidental words*) Where, for instance, St. Paul says concerning Christ, (Coloss. i. 16.) *By him were all*

words dropping from his apostles, when treating of other matters: but he would have told his followers plainly of them in his life-time, and not have told them, which he did continually, that he was *a man*, and *the Son of man*.

In the estimate * of Christ then, and according to his prescription, no other being or person whatsoever is to be worshiped, but the Father.

II.

Our next inquiry, in the order of our Lord's instructions before us is; what God is? He whom we are to worship.

"We may speak much, and yet come short: wherefore in sum he is all."

This caution of the son of Sirach, is always to be taken along with us in our re-

all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth &c. In which passage the apostle speaks not of the creation of the world, but of quite another matter. *Sequel p. 477.*

* Once on a very remarkable occasion, our Saviour was called upon to declare what was his own duty and the prescribed rule of his conduct, in the point of religious worship, Matth. iv. 10; where he says—*It is written; Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*; i. e. "I am a Jew, and subject to the law of the Jews: I am commanded therein to worship the Lord my God, and to serve him only." This excellent paraphrase of Christ's words, is given in "The exceptions of Mr. Edwards to the reasonableness of christianity &c. p. 23," one of the Unitarian Tracts, supposed to be written by the famous Mr. Locke. See the Preface to the last edition of Mr. Locke's works, p. xiii.

searches concerning God; that his nature and perfections infinitely surpass our highest conceptions of them. It is our duty however, and our happiness, to endeavour to attain just and right apprehensions of him, that we may reverence him in the best manner we are able according to his transcendent nature.

God is a Spirit—says our divine teacher.

Spirit is a term of various signification: when applied to God, the first thought it raises in us is, that he is infinitely removed from those gross properties that belong to matter and bodily substances: that he cannot be touched, or seen by the eye, because of the imperfections attending beings composed of such materials. In short, he is not the object of our bodily senses.

And hence it follows, that he cannot be defined by any figure or similitude, or described under any shape. To attempt to make a picture or image of the infinite God, is most degrading, most foolish as well as impious.

We see then nothing in the world without us, that can yield any resemblance of God; what he is as a spirit; or how he exists. The grandest objects in nature, the fairest forms are but senseless matter, liable to continual change, decay and dissolution. We must therefore have recourse to something of a higher nature than this material world,

world, to give us a just idea of the spirit that formed, animates and preserves it.

And this is REASON; the conscious mental power; that which informs and assures us of our own nature and existence, and of the existence and nature of other things.

By this it is, that surveying and reflecting on ourselves and things without us; the marks of boundless wisdom, power and goodness in the small part of the universe that falls within our notice; the infinite variety, connection and subserviency of all its parts to each other, the unity of benevolent design visible throughout; our own wonderful fabric, and above all, the moral powers, the disposition to approve things excellent, righteous and good, implanted in us, and that whatever is most excellent and perfect in the work must be in a vastly superior degree, in the intelligent artist; we thus rise up, by sure degrees, to the unseen creator, the sovereign mind, supremely wise, holy, and good, the one, sole, original, universal parent and author of all things.

III.

Having thus endeavoured to attain some faint idea of God, what he is as a Spirit, in our Lord's description of him: We are, by his directions, from these our best apprehensions of him to gather what that worship is, which will be acceptable to him.

"God is a Spirit, &c.

He then who is a Spirit, must be worshiped in Spirit; i. e. with the mind. It is the mind that is made for God. By this alone we are capable of knowing his adorable character, and paying the homage due to him. The worship of him by sacrifices and offerings, and numerous outward ceremonies, was now to cease. God never enjoined these as acceptable in themselves, but as testifying the inward regards of his worshipers, and as temporary expedients to lead mankind, in their infant unimproved state, to a pure and rational service. This he continually declared by his prophets.

The worship in spirit therefore, the true christian worship, admits no splendid outward pomp and ceremony, no showy rites of human invention. The more simplicity is found therein; the more the mind is engaged in contemplation of God alone, the more worthy of him, and more useful to the worshiper. Whatever strongly affects the senses, and diverts from inward thought and self recollection, obstructs the true end of divine worship, which is a retiring from all other things to converse with God alone. The affections may be raised for a while by the melody of sounds, and the passions soothed and suspended by gazing on a gay and gaudy ritual: but the spectator returns from the amusing scene
 exactly

exactly the same, without being impressed with one moral or spiritual truth, tending to make him a better man.

All true worship of God then is in the mind within, secretly apprehending his presence, and there offering suitable holy desires, of which words are the outward expressions.

When, for instance, we present ourselves as now with others to worship our Maker in the publick congregation, it is known only to him and ourselves whether we worship him at all, or our minds are engaged and taken up with other objects. For no farther do we pray to or praise God, than as our minds actually perceive his presence, and are turned towards him, and entertain those sentiments and affections which our words express.

All particular local worship of God is here also expressly superseded by our Saviour. Solomon, in a very sublime manner declared the omnipresence of God, at the same time that he was directed to supplicate his especial presence and attention in the temple that he had built: 1 Kings viii. 27. *"Will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven, and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have builded?"*

The infinite creator is to be worshiped in all places; for he is every where. He cannot be withdrawn from any of his works;

nor can he be ignorant of the thoughts or desires of his rational creatures, who have all their powers from him, and are upheld by him continually in the use of them.

No place is now more sacred than another : but every place sacred and meet for prayer. For the worshiper makes the place. Wherever there is a devout humble mind, that looks to God, God is there. A mind free from sinful stain, pious and benevolent, is the true temple of God ; and virtuous holy desires are the only acceptable offering to him.

The other qualification of christian worship prescribed by our Lord, is, that it be done *in truth* ; i. e. with sincerity : for so the same phrase is used in other places : 2 John i. 1. 3 Joh. i. 1. 2 Cor. vii. 14.

For God is a Spirit—i. e. a pure and perfect mind ; free from all moral defects and imperfection ; a lover of truth and righteousness. He cannot be flattered by outward bowings, and prostrations of the body, or captivated with unmeaning professions of respect, can only delight in sincerity and truth, and therefore can hear and approve the prayers only of those who endeavour to be holy, virtuous and good.

Our worship of God, if it be sincere, will draw along with it the practice of all virtue. There can be no true piety without virtuous practice.

“ *If any man among you* (says the apostle)

seem

seem to be religious, and bridletb not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God even the Father, is this; to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. James i. 26, 27.

No transports of devotion, no warmth of zeal for God and his true worship, will justify a man in the want of integrity and kindness to his fellow-creatures, or atone for wilful continuance in immoral practice.

In the worship of God we have nothing to do with men. It is a transaction betwixt him and ourselves alone. We must therefore have no worldly views in it, to recommend ourselves to the favour of others. There is no crime that our Saviour reprov'd with more asperity; as it is surely a thing most odious, and shews a mind sadly deformed. We should perform no act of devotion as a means of worldly interest, or in compliance with custom or fashion, which we should not do out of voluntary choice and a pure regard to God.

I shall now beg leave to close the subject with one or two remarks.

1. As our Lord here declares that the true worshipers shall worship the Father, in spirit and truth, and that he seeketh such to worship him: it hence followeth, that it is the duty of every christian to make public profession of his belief of the gospel-revelation

revelation and to join in public christian worship, that he may do honour to God before men, and promote the knowlege of him and of his truth in the world.

There are peculiar difficulties attending the situations of particular persons, of which every one must judge for himself. But as God requires all to worship him in truth and sincerity, if any be persuaded that the Father is the God alone to be worshiped, he should be careful of countenancing or joining customarily in the worship of any * other being or person besides or together with the supreme Father of all. For this

* The difficulty which Naaman, the Syrian general, proposed (2 Kings v. 17.) to the prophet Elisha, concerning his bowing to an idol on a particular occasion, with the prophet's reply, have been sometimes alleged as a sanction for a christian's compliance with a religious worship which he disapproves and condemns. There have been some plausible defences of the prophet given by learned men on the supposition that he gave a full permission to Naaman, as he requested. But the proper answer is, that we have nothing to do with the licence given by a prophet to a heathen man in any particular instance, nor can fetch our justification thence in any doubtful point. *God, who in times past suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways, and winked at the times of their ignorance, now commandeth all men every where to repent, and turn unto THE LIVING GOD who made heaven and earth—*(Acts xiv. 15, 16. xvii. 30.) The methods which the Father of the universe has employed in bringing back mankind from their apostacy to the acknowledgement of himself the only true God, appear to have been gradual, and always admirably suited to the circumstances of the times. It is not by any revelation at once made to all, but by
a series

this would tend to mislead others, and would be similar to the being present at and partaker of a feast made in a heathen temple, upon meats which had just before been offered in sacrifice to an idol: a practice which the apostle Paul condemns (1 Cor. viii. ix. x.) as sinful, and ensnaring weaker minds to idolatry.

a series of successive dispensations, that the important doctrine of the Unity of God was to be established in the world. That to the Israelites was partial, respecting only a small portion of men. It held however this great object uniformly in view, and prohibited the worship of any other God but Jehovah under the severest sanctions, being evidently intended to serve as a model in this respect, when all the nations were to be called in to become his people. In the case of the Israelites therefore, it would have been the height of impiety, and a breach of their covenant with God, for them, by any outward forms to own any other God; or by any seeming respect to be guilty of the least prevarication. And this because they had an express law given them, by which they were to be guided. But with respect to the nations not comprehended in that law, who were *strangers to the covenant*, history shews that they were left to walk in their own ways. And, now that by the gospel, a new covenant is made between God and all persons who own the name of Christ, the crime of dissembling and prevaricating in the case of God's worship, is exactly the same as it would have been in former times for an Israelite to have dissembled, and worshiped God and Baal. What an heathen did, or was permitted by a prophet to do, (if he was permitted,) can be nothing to a christian, who is under covenant. A citizen and stranger are not under the same obligations. An Israelite and a christian, are citizens of a community, are subjects to God in a peculiar sense; and the duties required of them cannot be dispensed with, because an heathen Naaman is excused.

We

We ought not surely to pray to or to join in prayer to any being or person in the public congregation, whom we would not address our prayers to in private in our closets.

2. The liberty of worshipping God, according to the dictates of conscience, has been restricted, for many ages, in every christian country, and is even at this day fully and securely enjoyed in none. We are thankful however to his over-ruling providence for the present opportunity, which, under him, is conceded to us by the spirit of the times. We cannot but wish to see it improved into an acknowledged right, persuaded that it would be productive of great good to man. It is a right to which all men have the strictest claim, as much as to breathe the air, or enjoy the warmth of the sun. It is what no human laws can abridge, or prescribe to; what no man can alienate, or give up and transfer to another. And it is not only the Jew, the Mohammedan, the worshipers of the true God: but the heathen idolater, who bows to his grim idol, must be allowed, equally with the * christian, to follow the dictate of his

* As soon as the christians had the civil power on their side, when the empire became christian under Constantine, they did not indeed put the Heathens to death, but they commonly shut up or destroyed their places of worship, broke their images, and did them many other injuries on account of their religion. By this

his own mind in his religious worship, till he is better informed.

If any of these teach doctrines contrary to the religion publicly professed, as the apostles of Christ did, in all countries whithersoever they went, no harm can ensue, whilst in other respects they demean themselves as good citizens and subjects of the state. If what they teach be true, it deserves attention; if false, it will come to nothing, and truth will in the end prevail.

3. As it has pleased God to make a standing revelation of his will for the benefit of mankind, it is the duty of all to inquire into it; not to receive it on trust, without examination; nor reject it without weighing the evidence for it. The indolence of many, in a matter of such momentous consequence, is melancholy to behold, and most offensive to every good mind.

Having been led by serious consideration of the words of Christ to the belief of the Father, the only living and true God, we are united in the worship and adoration of him only, and no other.

But we do not presume to blame, or oppose ourselves to those who adopt other forms of they certainly lost all right to complain of the manner in which the heathens had treated them in times past: for a heathen was equally justifiable in demolishing a christian church or chapel, as a christian in destroying a heathen temple.

worship.

worship. We have nothing to do with the sentiments and practice of others; but to be sincere in our own. We act up to our light; they, to their's. To agree in the same object of worship is necessary for the members of each worshiping society of christians: but to unite in love and goodwill, and mutual kind offices, is the duty of all christians, notwithstanding their different opinions and modes of worship. For this our Lord has made the mark of our belonging to him; Joh. xiii. 35. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

4. The *house of prayer*, in which we are now assembled, founded by the generous benefactions of friends, has not been erected by a contentious innovating spirit; but for the quiet and relief of those persons who cannot, with sincerity and approbation, join in prayer to any other being but the one living and true God, the Father; and is appropriated to the worship of him by those who receive Jesus as his messenger and a divine teacher.

Here we meet together, not as exempt from error, or having attained to wisdom and all truth; but by hearing the words of truth which Jesus taught, and by application to God, the fountain and giver of wisdom, to grow in knowledge and all goodness.

Your

Your Minister claims not any spiritual powers more than belong to every one of You. He considers himself only as one whom you have chosen for your instructor in the gospel, having a good opinion of his diligence and probity; but to whom you are tied no longer than he shall discharge his office with fidelity and to your approbation.

His province will be, not to speak any thing of himself, or dictate aught to you by his own authority; but to lay before you the words of Christ and the mind of God as revealed in the sacred writings, with such interpretation as may seem to throw light on that inestimable book, and afford the most powerful motives to a holy life, which is the prime end of all instruction.

What he shall dig out of the mine of sacred truth, he will think it his duty to present to you, not to receive it as pure gold, but to try it yourselves, and separate it from any dross or alloy that may stick to it. For in the things of religion, you are to take nothing on trust from any one, nor to assent any farther than as he gives sound reasons, or the evident authority of God's word, to which all are to submit.

You will not expect him to speak only such things as are palatable and agreeable to you, and fall in with your present notions: for that would be to *handle the word of God deceitfully*, and be a bar to
all

all farther improvement. But you are to bring with you to the hearing *of* or reading the scriptures a mind open, unbiaſſed, ready to receive what is ſhewn to be the truth, however contrary to your former ſentiments. And we muſt all cultivate a teachable, child-like temper: for we are all of us ignorant of many things, and of low attainments in wiſdom, and muſt ſo remain whiſt we are in this paſſing ſtate. And when we ſhall be removed out of it, this will be the moſt favourable diſpoſition for farther improvements, and the felicity of the future ſtate, which we aſpire after.

5. Laſtly. It is but a ſhort time that we have any of us to abide here; and therefore we ſhould omit no opportunity of bearing our testimony to the truth of God, and bringing others to the knowlege of it.

Thus did Chriſt *glorify the Father on earth, and finiſhed the work which he gave him to do*, Joh. xvii. 4.

The light of truth which he communicated to the world, his apoſtles, and others after them have handed down to us; ſome of them with great labour and loſs, and amidſt many dangers.

What we receive at ſo cheap and eaſy a price, we ſhould be careful to preſerve and deliver to thoſe that come after us.

Moſes, immediately after delivering the doctrine of the divine unity, gives this exhortation,

hortation, Deut. vi. 6, 7. "These words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them, when thou sittest in thine house, when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." If any of their children or family were in danger of worshipping any other but Jehovah, they would have disobeyed the divine command, if they had not shewn them their error, and instructed them in the truth.

Christians therefore, who have received from the Israelites this sacred deposit of the knowledge of the one true God, and also the divine words and example of Jesus, should be mindful to teach them their children. If you are favoured with a clearer knowledge of God and of his will, it is your duty to impart it to others, and especially to those most nearly connected with you, that they may enjoy all possible light and advantage for their eternal state.

THE

THE

PRAYER after the SERMON.

O THOU sovereign eternal Spirit, by whose wondrous goodness we have been brought into being out of nothing, and made capable of knowing and obeying thee; the infinite inexhaustible source of all that is great and good and excellent!

Assist us in the diligent and upright exercise of the powers bestowed upon us; that although we can never find thee out to perfection, or comprehend thy greatness and majesty, we may attain such knowledge of thee as is fitted for us, and cultivate those dispositions towards thee which may make us virtuous and happy.

We behold and adore, O God, the footsteps of thy wisdom, goodness and power divine, in the fair fabric of this world: but we cannot behold thee, who art a pure and perfect mind. Help us in the use of thy light afforded to us, so to improve our own minds, which bear thine image upon them,
and

and by which alone we are capable of apprehending thee, that we may render thee acceptable homage and worship.

Inspire us now and always, O thou Father of our spirits, with thoughts worthy of thee; that we may never meanly imagine thee to be captivated with an outward show and profession of duty, where the heart is not in thy ways: "but that we may worship thee with an enlightened understanding and with sincere devotion; and that our prayers and thanksgivings may be recommended to thy favourable regards, by the purity of our hearts, and the strict and uniform obedience of our lives."

Finally, O Lord our God, we beseech thee, that these our solemn assemblies for thy public honour and service, may be so conducted as to minister to our improvement in the knowledge of thee, in wisdom and all virtue; that we may have joy and satisfaction in these acts of social worship of thee our common Father; and may depart from them with such sentiments and impressions of duty to thee, and confirmed resolutions of obedience, as may, by thy blessing, be a means of carrying us innocently thro' these present scenes of mortality and trial, and gain us admittance in thy good time to the heavenly abodes and thy nearer presence, to live before thee in virtue and hap-

D

piness

pinefs for ever, which of thy boundless goodness thou haft promised us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Unto thee, O Father, who art the living and true God, be rendered praise, thanksgiving, and an increafing obedience, by us and by all thy reasonable creatures for ever and ever.

F I N I S.

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